

## **Chapter Eight: Next Steps**

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As the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) continues to develop its Amtrak *Cascades* intercity passenger rail program, the department will regularly update and evaluate operational, financial, and environmental plans in order to provide accurate information on the program's progress to taxpayers, legislators, the Governor, and the Washington Transportation Commission.

In addition to future planning updates, a number of other steps will be taken in order to ensure that Amtrak *Cascades* service and plans continue to be aligned with the goals and policies of the Governor, WSDOT, and the Washington Transportation Commission, while continuing to meet the needs of the traveling public. These steps will include:

- ***Release of This Plan.*** This plan was revised and expanded from the Updated Plan released in April 2000. Incorporated into this update are revised ridership forecasts, new and expanded lists of needed project improvements, and a general discussion of revised operations. This revised plan will be used as a guide to move forward into future service expansion, and comply with existing state and federal transportation planning requirements.
- ***Incorporation of this Plan into the next Statewide Transportation Plan.*** WSDOT is required to produce a multi-modal transportation plan for the State of Washington every few years. The plan, known as the Washington Transportation Plan (WTP) serves as a blueprint for transportation programs and investments. The next WTP will look ahead at state and local transportation system needs and priorities for the twenty-year period between 2007 and 2026. *Washington State Draft Long Range Plan for Amtrak Cascades* will be included in this next WTP update.
- ***Regular Performance Reporting.*** WSDOT publishes a performance report every three months for the Governor, Washington Transportation Commission, the state legislature and the public that highlights the ongoing and varied activities of the department. The report, known as *Measures, Markers, and Mileposts* includes Amtrak *Cascades* performance statistics and program status reports. Amtrak *Cascades* statistics featured include monthly and annual ridership, on-time performance, customer satisfaction, and farebox recovery. The report is designed to provide the policymakers and taxpayers of Washington with a clear picture of what WSDOT is doing and how well the department is performing so that WSDOT continues to be accountable to the people of Washington State.

- **Monitor and Pursue Additional Funding Sources.** WSDOT will continue to monitor and pursue various funding from state and federal sources. The department will also work closely with the BNSF, Amtrak, and local communities to partner on projects and share costs.
- **Environmental Review.** As funding becomes available, WSDOT will prepare the appropriate national and state environmental documents for each proposed project improvement, as necessary. Copies of environmental documents which have already been produced can be obtained from the WSDOT Rail Office.
- **Cost Allocation.** WSDOT is currently in the process of working with cooperating organizations and agencies to identify cost responsibility for each project. The new WSDOT/BNSF *Master Corridor Development Agreement* governs this cost sharing agreement for capital projects within Washington State.
- **Consumer Market Research.** Amtrak's Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) scoring system and onboard surveys are routinely conducted to ensure that WSDOT's plans for increased service meet the needs of the ticket-buying passenger.
- **Marketing.** On-going marketing of Amtrak *Cascades* service is the joint responsibility of Amtrak and WSDOT. Both organizations will continue to actively market Amtrak *Cascades* through a variety of media so that the traveling public is aware of the service, the amenities that are available, the competitive price structure of the service, and the overall benefits of rail travel in the Pacific Northwest.
- **Public Involvement.** The public is routinely invited to help improve Amtrak *Cascades* service, to participate in the development of this plan, and to shape other state rail program policies. Examples include customer comment cards aboard Amtrak *Cascades* trains, open houses, advisory groups, interviews conducted on an as-needed basis, and email messages sent to [rail@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:rail@wsdot.wa.gov). In addition, as part of the environmental process for each capital improvement, public involvement plays a critical role in the development and analysis of the project.

These are the various facets that make up the components of Amtrak *Cascades* service and its implementation. These activities will continue throughout the course of the program's development.

## **When is the proper time to evaluate the success of the Amtrak Cascades program?**

To ensure that the program reaches its ridership goals and is providing the public benefits envisioned by the legislature, the Amtrak *Cascades* program will be evaluated at the service's mid-point (when eight round trips between Seattle and Portland, OR are reached).<sup>1</sup>

This decision to evaluate the program at the mid-point was made based on case studies from around the United States which indicated that eight round trips provide the appropriate level of ridership and revenue to determine if the rail program is successful and should move forward.

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<sup>1</sup>As identified in Washington's Transportation Plan 1997-2016, Washington State Department of Transportation, 1996, page 49.

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